

URCO Grant Proposal for
Talking to Clouds
an original musical written by: Gary Kemp, Erik Anderson,
Mellissa and Steven Hinrichs

Applicants: Gary Kemp (Playwright), Erik Anderson (Composer, Music Director),
Elizabeth Bohannon (Director), Connor Stevens (Sound Design)
Faculty Mentor: Shawn Fisher

Proposal Narrative:

Creative Goal

This proposal is to fund an original musical in and for Cache Valley, UT. In this project we will be collaborating with various university students, teachers and community members. We are searching to discover the challenges and successes of collaborating interdepartmentally, and with the community on an original Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) musical. In addition to interdepartmental collaboration, we want to know what the audience response is to an original musical in Cache Valley, and whether viewing an original musical will impact future theatre attendance.

This project will contribute to the artistic value of theatre within USU and the community in Cache Valley. We believe that by producing an original musical at USU we will be able to provide audiences with an enriching experience that only original theatre possesses. Our hope is that this project will enrich the history of theatre within Cache Valley by increasing interest in the arts among community members, inspiring future artists to develop their own visions, and providing documentation on the process. We anticipate positive audience responses to viewing this original work and we hope that their response will allow more original full length plays to be produced at USU.

Talking to Clouds is a full-length musical that will inspire children and adults to overcome challenges and find their inner courage as they go through difficult times. The script has already been written and the score is currently being written.

Our goal is to bring together a group of interdepartmental artists from the music and theatre departments within the Caine College of the Arts to collaborate in producing an original musical for the benefit of Cache Valley's artistic history. We intend on involving members of the community in the process by opening auditions to the public, advertising performances through local media including the Herald Journal, radio ads, and local social media sources, and receiving feedback from audiences in the form of optional, anonymous questionnaires that will be distributed at the end of each performance.

These will focus on assessing the benefits of attending an original musical in Cache Valley. In our research for these questionnaires we have found a lack of information on studies done about audience reception on new plays. We feel by documenting our process and audience experience it will ignite more research on this topic. We will ask audience members to compare *Talking to Clouds* with other musicals they've attended in the past and ask them to describe how the fact that this show was written and developed at USU affected their overall experience, and if they would like to see more original works in Cache Valley after their experience watching this original production. We will then co-write a report on the effects of an original musical on community growth, anonymously sourcing the feedback we

received from the questionnaires. This report will be the culmination of this work and will be presented after the completion of the project.

Project Significance

Theatre thrives on collaboration and cultivation of new ideas. Fresh perspectives on design and interpretations of characters are key to the experiences and significance to theatre. This level of collaboration is of benefit to the community and is one of the reasons why live theatre has been able to survive despite the growth of the motion picture industry. The City of Logan has a rich history with live theatre, with venues such as the Ellen Eccles Theatre, The Lyric Theatre, and the Utah Opera company, and the continually growing theatre department at USU. They have all been important in developing stage performances and contributing to the theatre history of Cache Valley. However, with such a rich theatre scene, rarely does the valley get the pleasure of an original full-length musical theatre production. According to Rick Desrochers, the literary director of the new play and musical development to the Joseph Papp public theatre, “Without the development and nurturing of new plays and playwrights the theatre will atrophy.” Most theatres are restricted to the confines of past work and they can lack originality. *Talking to Clouds* will greatly benefit the community with its story and music and provide the people of Cache Valley with the experience of a new musical.

It will also enhance the theatre program in the Caine College of the Arts as it inspires other playwrights to write and produce their own work. To help ensure this, we will gather research about how the audience responds to a new work and how it affects their desire to see more original full-length theatre at USU. There haven’t been any studies in Cache Valley about how original plays affect audience response. This research can gather information about what audiences want to see on stage and will be resourceful for USU theatre and other Cache Valley venues when they create their production season. Based on this research, they may decide to look for more local playwrights to produce original work.

This project started as a ten-minute play that Gary Kemp wrote for his playwriting class in Fall 2017. After receiving encouragement from his class and professor, Shawn Fisher, he decided to turn it into a full-length musical. Kemp was able to enlist the help of his peers at USU to participate in workshops on the play. These workshops were held during the Spring semester of 2019 and were a means to provide feedback on the play and to involve other students in the production. Through these workshops, Kemp, Stevens, Bohannon and Anderson, came together and decided to produce this play. As excitement for the play grew, we spoke with Adrienne Moore, the head of the Theatre Department at USU, and got permission to make this a student led theatre performance and reserved the Black Box Theater for March of 2020.

After scheduling a date for the performances, other students in the theatre department quickly jumped at the opportunity to be involved. With all the support we have received for this project we are even more determined than ever to successfully produce *Talking to Clouds* and provide the cultural benefits of having an original musical developed from the ground up for the community of Cache Valley and Utah State University.

Methodology

This is an interdisciplinary project that involves many different theatrical and musical elements. Each person on this application has very distinct roles to fulfill in creating this

original production and in conducting the research on audience feedback. Each person's roles are outlined as follows:

Gary Kemp wrote the play and will be the acting Producer for the show. He will oversee recruiting designers, workers, and crew members for the show, the majority of which he has already completed. He will also be completing his capstone project by being the Set Designer of this productions. Kemp will recruit/delegate volunteers from the Theatre Technology department to ensure the proactive building of sets, costumes, and props needed for the show.

Connor Stevens will work on any sound needs for the show as the show's Sound Designer, including supervising the recording sessions. He and Kemp will also work with the lighting designer to ensure proper hanging and focusing of light fixtures that may be needed. All lights, and most of the props, set, and costume pieces, should be able to be pulled from USU Theatre Department inventory.

Erik Anderson is in charge of writing an original score for all of the music. He will find USU and community musicians to rehearse the original score. Together with Stevens, they will record the music to be used for rehearsals and performances. Anderson will also be the musical director for the actors.

Elizabeth Bohannon is the director for the play. She is responsible for creating an artistic vision and foreseeing that all the parts of the production, sound, lights, costumes, set, acting, music, and choreography fit within her artistic vision and that they flow with the script to form one cohesive theatrical production. She will lead design meetings and direct every rehearsal.

Rehearsals will start on February 17th, 2020. They will be scheduled from 6-10 every weekday. It will be the responsibility of Kemp and the stage management to schedule rehearsal spaces in advance each week of rehearsals. Bohannon will ensure that engaging and productive rehearsals are held each night. Select days of rehearsal will be set aside for Anderson to work with the actors on vocal techniques and developing, under the artistic vision of Bohannon, the musical pedagogy for the show.

Most of the labor for this project includes the designing, building, rehearsing, the ultimate performance of the show, and distributing questionnaires for audience feedback, as mentioned above. The script is complete and music score is scheduled to be completed by the start of the Spring 2020 semester. After the run of the show, the applicants will use the remainder of the semester to co-write a report documenting the experience, and the audience feedback.

We will be holding open auditions for the show on November 13th and 14th, with callbacks scheduled to be on November 15th. Those who audition will have the option of attending the auditions live or sending in a recording of their audition material to the production's Stage Manager by the audition date. Our hopes are to provide as many people who may wish to audition with the opportunity to do so. We will use social media as our main source for announcing the auditions, as well as putting up flyers around USU campus and select venues throughout Cache Valley. Flyers will be distributed by mid-October to give community members plenty of time to prepare the required audition materials. Because of budgetary restrictions actors will not be paid for this production. Also, because of conflicting schedules with the USU Theatre department's Spring lineup of shows, certain theatre students will not be cast in *Talking to Clouds* if they are involved in other USU productions.

After cast lists are distributed it will be the responsibility of Kemp/Stage Management to get signed commitments from cast members.

The original score for the show will be completely recorded to accommodate for the small space of the Black Box Theater. Musicians will be hired for a small fee from the USU music department and the community if needed. They will be expected to practice the score given to them before the scheduled recording day(s), which will be announced to them at the time of their employment (possible dates: February 7th and 8th, 2020.) Payment may be withheld if professional attention is not given to practicing, rehearsing, and recording the music.

Tech Rehearsals will start on March 16th, 2020 and run to the 23rd. Dress rehearsals will be March 23rd-25th. The run of the show is scheduled for March 26th-28th, 2020 at 7:30pm with a Matinee showing at 2pm on the 28th. The completed set will be moved into the Black Box Theatre on March 16th. Lighting and sound should be completed by the 16th as well.

To ensure that collaborative findings are being documented each applicant will keep weekly journal entries about their experience collaborating interdepartmentally and with the community. Each project member will keep a journal, since each person will have different experiences collaboration. These journals will include information about challenges and successes of putting on the show.

We will also create and distribute surveys to the audience members asking them about their experience viewing *Talking to Clouds*, an original musical. These surveys will gather information about past USU productions they have seen, how this original production has influenced them and whether they would like to see more original work in Cache Valley. Once we have collected all of the audience responses, we will write a report gathering the data of audience responses, as well as information from our personal journal entries on interdepartmental collaboration of an original musical. These reports will be presented at the USU research symposium and other locations based on the success of the project.

Feasibility

Recruitment for this project is vital to its success. We have already put together a group of talented designers and artists who are enthusiastic about this show, and we are confident that we will be able to inspire more talent to join us in this creative endeavor. The more people we are able to recruit the easier it will be to complete this project.

Obtaining actors has been a struggle for student projects in the past. We hope that by opening auditions to members of the public and by giving actors the choice to audition live or by recording that we will increase the number of people we can select from. On top of this, the show does not require a large cast and can reasonably be produced with anywhere from 7-12 actors. We will adjust our casting choices based on the number of people who audition.

Financially we will be doing everything we can to cut costs across the board. We will make sure that designers know that we are aiming for minimalistic visions and we will work closely with the USU Theatre Department to recycle or borrow as much material as possible. It is our hope that with the URCO funding we will have all the finances we need to put on this show without having to charge an entrance fee to audience members.

We anticipate that there will be various challenges and setbacks to scheduling spaces for rehearsals as well as expected limitations using USU scene and costume shop equipment. We will need to coordinate in advance with the scene shop and costume shop managers so that we don't create conflict in their work for the USU productions.

However, along with setbacks there will also be moments of success such as, creative opportunities and growth for all involved in the project, increased excitement for new play development within USU and the community, and the advancement of research on audience reception in Cache Valley.

Conclusion

We believe that in producing *Talking to Clouds* we will deeply enrich the theatre environment of Cache Valley by producing a full-length original musical. We look forward to facing the challenges and experiencing the successes of collaborating interdepartmentally to produce this play. We anticipate that audience survey responses will be positive and that they will provide helpful feedback on the production and reception of the play. We hope our research will be a source of inspiration to future artists who seek to produce their work in their own communities. We're grateful for your consideration of our project. If you have any further questions, feel free to email Gary Kemp and he will be happy to respond.

Works Cited

DesRochers, Rick. "TDR Comment: Where Do New Plays Come From?" *TDR* (1988-), vol. 52, no. 4, 2008, pp. 7–12. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25145551.

Elizabeth Bohannon

Major- Theatre Education

Education Plan

In addition to discovering the impact the original musical has on the community of Cache Valley, the following education plan is what I wish to obtain in directing *Talking to Clouds*.

Learning Objective 1: I will understand and experience how communication between playwright, composers and designers work on an original, student led, piece of work.

- I will lead design meetings where we will collaborate on the creation of the set and costumes for the play. I anticipate learning how to best communicate and lead the group towards a successful show where all design elements are one cohesive whole.
- I will learn how to be a more effective team player in working with my peers to make this show a success.

Learning Objective 2: I will experience and understand what it is like to cast an original play using live and digital audition entries.

- I look forward to applying the knowledge I have learned in my classes about auditions, by actually being the person who watches and casts the show. I anticipate taking notes and giving everyone the benefit of the doubt on their auditions.

Learning Objective 3: I will develop on original director's vision for *Talking to Clouds* and direct the show accordingly.

- This entails diving deep into the world of the script and taking my interpretations of the script and bringing them to life. I will break down the script into beats/moments and outline the directions needed for the actors for each line and moment in the play that will help fulfill the vision I create.
- I will do extensive research on the play by conversing with the playwright on any information that is not provided in the script that would be useful in working with the actors and designers to fulfill the director's vision.
- I will communicate my vision all involved in the production and we will collaborate together on how to make it come to life.

Learning Objective 4: I will learn how to collect theatre research data and compile it into a research report

- I will create and collect audience surveys about their experience viewing the original play and how that experience affects their future theatre attendance.
- Using the information gathered in the surveys I will co-write a report on our collaborative experience and the audience feedback.

Gary Kemp's Education Plan

My educational goals are in accordance with the overall goals and hopes for the production of *Talking to Clouds*. Additionally, this project will be an important inclusion in my co-artist's and my own professional portfolios. By the end of the project I hope to have obtained the following objectives:

- Learning Objective 1: I will understand the process of writing an original musical and the collaboration with composers necessary to doing so.
 - I will work with Erik Anderson, Mellissa Hinrichs, and Steven Hinrichs to complete the full musical score for *Talking to Clouds*.
- Learning Objective 2: I will better understand the process of designing and facilitating the build of a set for a realized production as the Set Designer for *Talking to Clouds*.
 - I will work with Elizabeth Bohannon in developing a reasonable set design that will help enhance her artistic vision for the show.
 - I will facilitate and instruct crew members in building the set for the show.
 - I will understand basic drafting principles and research different uses of set pieces in creating an engaging setting for the show.
- Learning Objective 3: I will understand the processes involved in being a Producer for a realized production and gain experience organizing and leading a group of artists in the planning, rehearsing, recording and building of an original musical.
 - I will be able to answer questions regarding the overall production, and ensure that the whole production team understands their individual responsibilities.
 - I will keep track of the production's finances and ensure that the entire production team has enough money to reasonably buy materials for the show.
 - I will work with the Stage Manager to provide a production calendar to the production team.
 - I will work with the Stage Manager to ensure that venues are provided for rehearsals, recordings, and performances for the project.
- Learning Objective 4: I will archive and distribute any documentation for the show *Talking to Clouds*. This will provide all members of the production team with portfolio material and assist in the writing of the Research Paper for this project.
 - I will ensure that there is video and photographic documentation of rehearsals, designs, and the performances of the show.
 - I will keep a weekly journal describing the successes and failures of the project throughout the rehearsal, design, and performance of the show.
 - I will supervise the clean-up process, or strike, of the show and ensure that any artistic material from sets, costumes, or props are given to the designer who built them.

Connor Stevens' Education Plan

Below is an outline of things that I hope to accomplish while being the sound designer for *Talking to Clouds*:

1. Learn the basics of foley sound production and recording.
 - a. I will work with the musicians and Production Services to record the musicians.
 - b. I will use everyday objects to record sound effects (foley) and then load them into the show in an organized cue list.
2. Learn to multitrack record and be able to master the final recording for production in the USU Black Box Theatre.
 - . Be able to record on multiple tracks simultaneously and then balance the levels for optimal sound in the USU Black Box Theatre.
3. Experiment further into the possibilities of theatrical sound design and directionality of sound.
 - a. I will record sounds that are surreal to exploit psychoacoustics (the effect that happens when someone hears a sound and immediately categorizes it based on their past experiences).
 - b. I will use these sounds and send them to different speakers placed around the room to make it seem as if the sound is coming from a different direction than the overhead speakers.

Erik Anderson's Education Goals

My goal is to use what I have collectively learned in previous classes to this point by putting on a musical titled *Talking to Clouds*. In accordance to NASM Handbook goal VIII.B.2.b, I will draw from my collective understandings gathered from previous musicology classes to show proficiency in compositional, performance, analytical, scholarly, and pedagogical applications relevant to the course. I will do so in the following ways:

- a. Composition – I will compose and arrange original songs, reprises, and vamps for the musical *Talking to Clouds*.
- b. Performance – I will perform my skills as a director of music for the musical at the end of the course. Additional performance requirements may be added on due to lack of musicians available for recordings.
- c. Analytical – I will show my ability to analyze the music in like genres and forms of the songs he is working on. For example, analyzing the musical styles of Ella Fitzgerald to match her style. Or analyzing the form structure of jazz musical songs done in the musical *Hadestown*.
- d. Scholarly - To provide research for future artists hoping to produce original work I will help write questionnaires to gather information from the audience about their experience seeing this original work. I will also co-write a report that will be a guideline for future productions of this nature.
- e. Pedagogical – I will act as the director of music for the musical. I will run auditions, lead rehearsals, record music, and ensure an environment of overall professionalism in both instrumental and choral disciplines.